

# slumber party

When you can't sleep, the temptation to pop a sleeping pill is strong. But did you know you could be risking your life?



**T**here's a large body of research indicating that sleeping pills may contribute to as many as 500,000 deaths each year in the United States. Most sleeping pills are "sedative hypnotics"—a class of drugs used to treat anxiety. Examples include Xanax, Valium, Lunesta, and Ambien. Most of these drugs are highly addictive and come with a range of side effects, such as dizziness, drowsiness, and impaired coordination.

## Sleeping Pills' Dark Side

The most serious risks of these drugs relate to their effects on memory and behavior. Because they act on brain chemistry, sleeping pills can cause changes in brain function and behavior, including memory impairment, nervousness, confusion, hallucinations, irritability, and aggressiveness. They have also been shown to increase feelings of depression, including suicidal thinking.

Daniel F. Kripke, MD, Professor of Psychiatry Emeritus at the University of California, San Diego, has worked for more than 30 years assessing the risk of sleeping pills, and his findings are stunning.

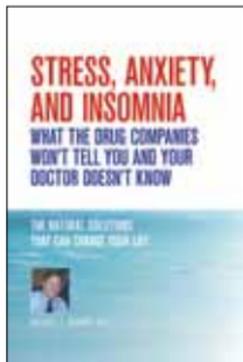
For one thing, 18 population-based studies have shown a clear link between the use of sleeping pills and increased mortality risk. Four of these studies specifically found that the use of sleeping pills predicted increased risk of death from cancer.

In the latest study, published February 2012 in *BMJ Online*, Kripke's team obtained medical records for 10,529 people prescribed hypnotic sleeping pills, and compared them to

records for 23,676 matched patients never prescribed sleeping pills. Over an average of 2½ years, the death rate for those who did not use sleeping pills was 1.2 percent, versus 6.1 percent for those who did. Subjects with sleeping pill prescriptions also had a 35 percent higher risk of cancer. Based on these findings, Kripke estimates that sleeping pills can be linked to 320,000–507,000 US deaths each year.

## Poor Sleep Quality

Sleep recharges the energy within our cells and, among other things, helps to remove harmful chemicals from the body—particularly the brain. Sleep also helps enhance antioxidant mechanisms



## free book!

*Better Nutrition's* Second Opinion columnist, Michael T. Murray, ND, has just released his latest book: *Stress, Anxiety, and Insomnia: What the Drug Companies Won't Tell You and Your Doctor Doesn't Know*. The first 50 readers to email their names and mailing addresses to [betternutritionfreebie@gmail.com](mailto:betternutritionfreebie@gmail.com) will receive a free copy of Murray's book, which discusses natural solutions that can change your life. Please type "Stress Book" in the subject line.

Murray is the recipient of this year's prestigious President's Award from the Natural Products Association. The award recognizes outstanding individuals that have made important contributions to the success of the natural products industry.

that reduce free radical damage.

A likely explanation for the potential negative effects of sleeping pills is that they interfere with these normal sleep patterns, thereby robbing the body of sleep's powerful healing effects.

Sleeping pills are also notorious for preventing deeper stages of non-REM sleep. That's usually why these drugs produce a morning "hangover" feeling.

## Cause and Effect

The first step is to identify and address the causes of the problem. Consider sleep maintenance insomnia, when people are able to fall asleep but awaken in the middle of the night and have difficulty getting back to sleep. Many people with this condition suffer from faulty blood sugar control, so addressing that issue can dramatically

improve sleep quality.

Other common causes of insomnia are stress, depression, anxiety, caffeine sensitivity, and even certain medications—there are well over 300 drugs that can interfere with normal sleep.

## Natural Sleep Aids

I recommend a combination of melatonin (3 mg), 5-HTP (30 mg), and L-theanine (200 mg). These ingredients work together to decrease nighttime awakenings and the time required to fall asleep.

Recent studies have substantiated the herb valerian's ability to improve sleep quality and relieve insomnia. As a mild sedative, use up to 900 mg, 30–45 minutes before going to bed.